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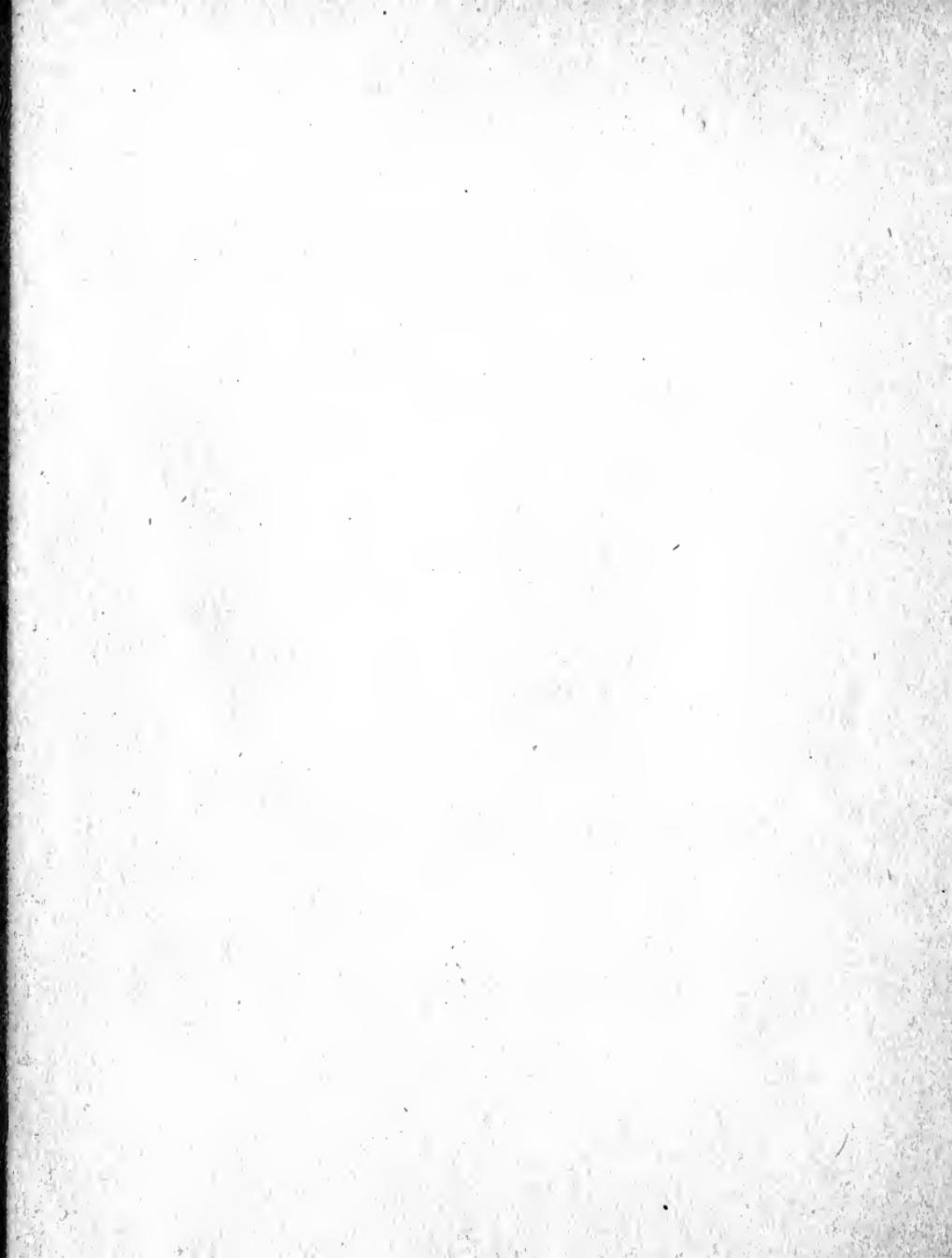


TO -
KARL
THEODOR
GERMAN



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TO KARL THEODOR GERMAN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

PLATEN

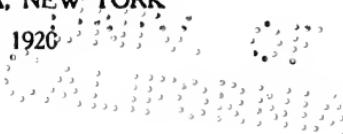
BY

REGINALD B. COOKE, Ph. D.

A.B. (Cal.) 1909.

ITHACA, NEW YORK

1920



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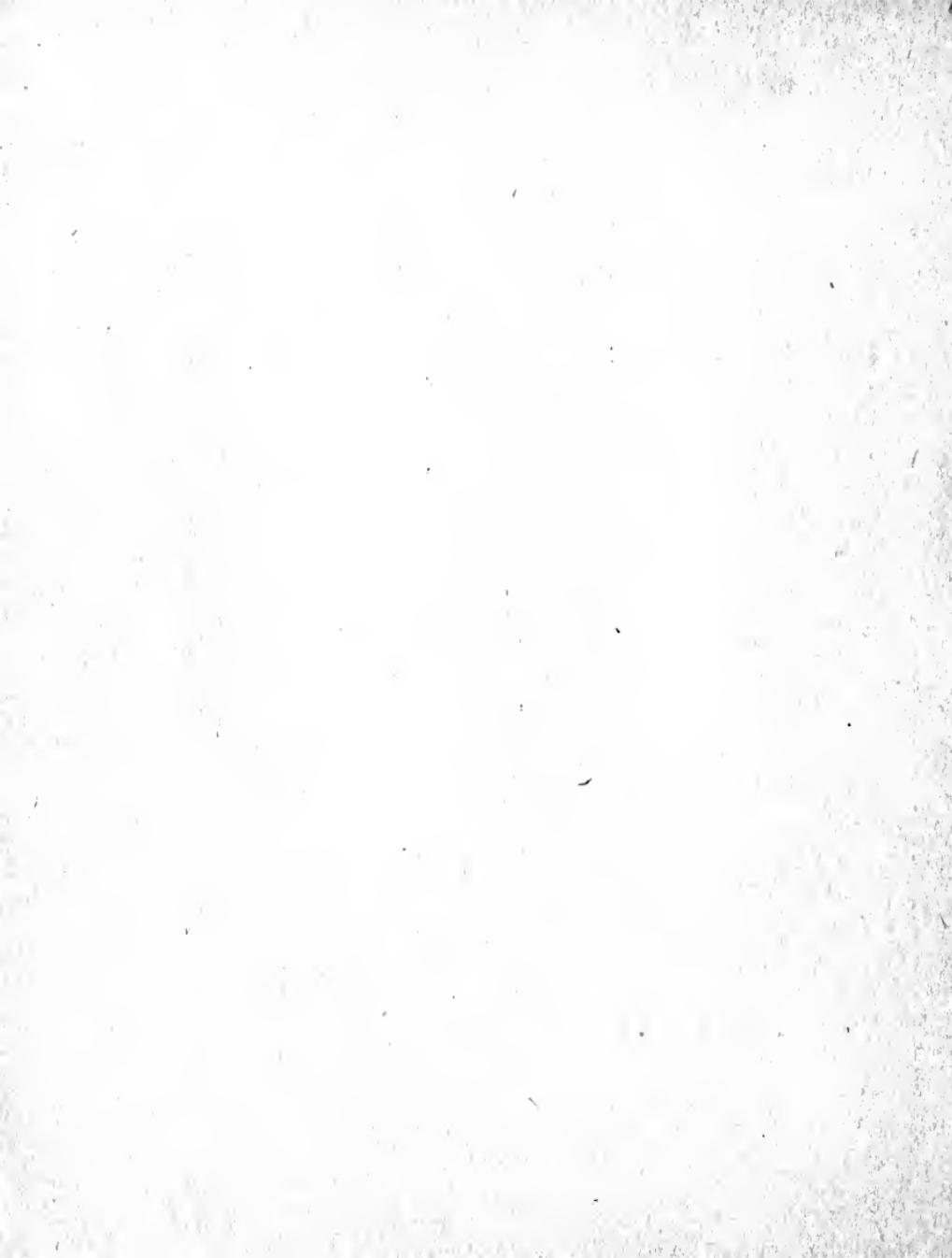
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Foreword

These sonnets, now presented in an English translation for the first time,* were written at Erlangen in the early months of 1826, and are thus of slightly later date than the two cycles which I have previously translated.† Platen first saw German, who was a theological student from the Bavarian Palatinate, in November, 1825, and first spoke to him at a ball in January, 1826. We may believe, as Platen tells us, that the friendship which these sonnets celebrate, though of such a short duration and unhappy ending, surpassed all his earlier attachments in strength and purity of feeling, but his judgment that the sonnets similarly excel all those of earlier date may prove to many less acceptable.

The rhyme-scheme of these translations is again identical with that of the originals, these sonnets showing no exception to Platen's regular form. I have once made use of a feminine rhyme, where the high-flown language of the German seemed to warrant this departure from custom; and once I have carried on one of the octave's rhymes through the sestet, a procedure to which, though it is generally disapproved, I cannot see the least objection. On this occasion I have met with unbroken



success, though perhaps somewhat at the cost of spontaneity, in dividing each sonnet into four parts, within which again there is a minimum of enjambement. So meticulous is Platen's art in these respects that the imitation of rhymes and periods is in itself a puzzling task preliminary to all considerations of poetic value. For the rest, traces of the conflict, so familiar to every translator of verse, between faithfulness to the original and the intrinsic merit of the translation will no doubt be found sufficiently evident, but it is at least the right of a translator to demand that his work be in no particular condemned without comparison with the original.

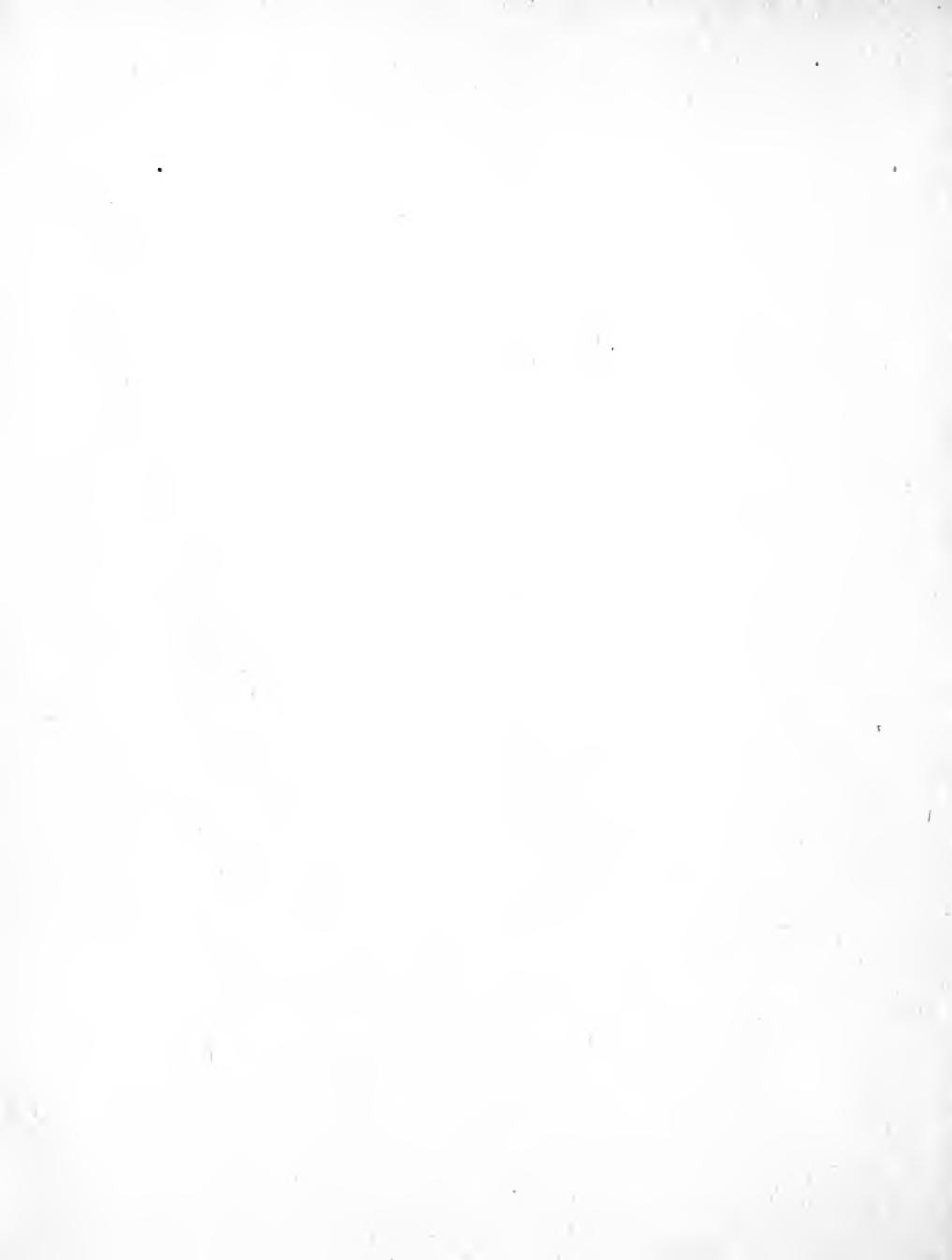
Orr's Island, Maine.

R. B. C.

*With the exception of a translation of the ninth in Longfellow's *Poets and Poetry of Europe* and of the eighteenth in Edward Carpenter's *Anthology of Friendship*.

†*Sonnets from Venice*, 1914, and *To Cardenio*, 1919.

I have now translated nearly half of Platen's sonnets, and hope to complete the work in a few years, so that the several series may be issued in a single volume.



Jene Sonette werden nicht untergehen und das
Übermasz von Freundschaft, das ich immer für diesen
Menschen fühlen werde, der Nachwelt überliefern.

—Platen.

TO KARL THEODOR GERMAN

I



WHEN shall I master this anxiety
Which seizes me when thou, dear friend, art nigh?
I seek thy presence even as a spy,
Hoping yet fearing to discover thee.

How can I fear 'fore one I fain would see
Folded in my embrace? Oh, tell me why
So swift my blood is checked, and what can tie
My spirit as with bonds of slavery.

Is it the dread lest thou thine heart shouldst close,
Lest on the crags of thy false pride I steer,
Ever avowed the greatest of love's foes?

Is it the godliness of bonds so dear,
Since love, as before God, for ever shows
Before its object reverence and fear?

II

YOU too deceive me, since where'er I turn
I know that all defraud me and deceive.
You fill my mouth with bitterness, and leave
My heart with flames of longing still to burn.

And that which all save enemies would spurn
Must I, a friend's reward, from you receive;
Yet I the splendor of thy name achieve,
That future ages may thy praises learn.

But howsoever cold thine heart may grow,
Still by my dewy-glistening eyes I swear
Thy love I will not even yet forego.

Spring as her mirror chooses one so fair;
Youth laughs and sparkles on thy brow, as though
The sunshine and th' aurora mingled there.

III

THAT I do have abundant right for scorn
At such dishonorable injuries
I deeply feel, though if my heart should please
To enjoy this right, unwilling am I drawn.

For this I deem the most accursed thorn
Which an unkindly fate has thrust in these
Our love's still all too young amenities,
Dragged to the grave almost so soon as born.

What for the future can I hope from you,
If at the very dawn of our new-found
Affection such a bolt strikes from the blue?

But ah! my right renounces every ground
For being, seeing thee so fair to view,
And lives in truth only on empty sound.

IV

THOUGH in the flesh our steps apart we bend,
Our spirits still in memory entwine;
And when my soul merges itself in thine,
My thoughts, I fancy, must thine ear attend.

Possessed not God Love's wings, how should He lend
Her guidance on a mission so divine?
And if thy soul in dreams he grants to mine,
Of whom save thee could He such visions send?

If you but love me, gladly will I brook
Thine absence, since of what our souls complain
Well know I, though they be by speech forsook.

And yet while I must still in doubt remain,
And long to interrogate thine every look,
I count our separation naught but pain.

V

YOU love and yet are silent. Oh, 'twere best
I too unspeaking had indulged mine eyes.
I had not learnt how silence mortifies,
If I had ne'er a word to thee addressed.

Yet would I not our love be ne'er confessed,
And woe the day when it grows cold and dies!
For it was sent us from celestial skies,
Where throng in amity the angels blest.

Therefore be this sweet fancy still allowed,
That you do love me, lest, all desolate
My soul, my faith must perish unavowed.

Deny me not the day, disdainful Fate,
When to a loyal friend a soul so proud
Though fair shall every hidden thought relate.

SEEK you a friend who should to death be true,
In joy and sorrow ever at thy side,
Make choice of me, for one more qualified
Thou canst not find to pledge himself to you.

Truly he cannot spread, as thou canst do,
The raptures of his beauty far and wide;
But all men hear with unreluctant pride
The charms which his inspired lips bestrew.

I only fear that it may cause thee grief,
If I such lofty praise of self allow,
So to assume a splendor past belief.

For else would I declare that even now
The flickering shadow of a laurel leaf
Falls on this young and still unwrinkled brow.

VII

SWEET Spring, with hastening steps list my appeal.
This once come earlier than in former days,
A bland physician, when our breast betrays
Uneasiness, gently its wounds to heal.

Might I already midst thy blossoms steal,
When scarce on the horizon yet forth blaze
The fires of day, until their dying rays
Depart, my tears not wishing to conceal.

When bright thy sun flames in the azure skies,
Would I, outstretched, through the tall grasses peep,
To view my fancied friend with dazzled eyes.

Then o'er my blinking lids should slumbers creep,
Until I saw the glittering stars arise,
And by his image felt refreshed in sleep.

VIII

ALTHOUGH, my grief in silence to allay,
Find some propitious place and hour I will,
Yet yonder hovers thy fair image still,
While nearer objects swiftly fade away.

Good fellowship my wanderings cannot stay,
Yet solitude the sorrowing soul can ill
Endure, and thought no respite brings, until,
Complaining to the winds, idly I stray,

If from this pain you wish me ever freed,
Oh make thy true affection seen and heard,
For 'tis of thee alone my heart hath need.

Many the friends I loved false to their word ;
Yet may the world in these my pages read
That thee before all others I preferred.

FAIR as the day and lovely as the dawn,
With noble brow and eyes of trustful calm,
Youthful in years and youthful in thy charm,
So found I thee, so were my sorrows born.

Oh were I now safe to thy bosom drawn,
Where I might ease my soul of all alarm!
Oh that I might thine heart of fears disarm
Which bid our tryst await another morn!

Why do you shun me? Do I merit scorn?
Why thus afflict one who hath ever shown
Affection, and why leave me thus forlorn?

Swift as the bias of thy thoughts is known,
With anxious raptures shall my heart be torn,
As when a prince ascends the royal throne.

X

THE world is falser than my words can paint,
And blessed he on whom her glance ne'er fell.
She treasures up our sorrows in a shell,
And gives us drink therefrom when we are faint.

So may the world, midst many a complaint,
From me, her instrument, a song compel,
O'er distant times perchance to cast its spell,
I as a living sacrifice attaint.

You who extol my lot, and have believed
You well might envy me my happy days,
How can you linger so long undeceived?

Had I not tasted in a thousand ways
The poison of the world, I had achieved
No heaven-sent task for you to prize and praise.

THOU hast prepared me hours of grievous dread,
For which, I pray, may Heaven never wreak
Vengeance on thee; else were with tears thy cheek
Bedewed, when from thy lips my name is sped.

Yet until all delusive hopes are fled
Before assurance, though it but bespeak
Frailty, thy vindication will I seek,
Never by chance appearances misled.

No advocate am I, yet rest assured
That my two eyes shall ever intercede
For thee, by craft into thy service lured.

So long as they upon thy beauty feed,
Love, as their food, therefrom must be procured,
While you my sorrows in their glances read.

THE muse of every songster, Admiration,
Bids me extol the things of highest worth.
Artists and scholars, ladies and men of birth
I praise, and so pursue my inclination.

You are the soul of every inspiration,
The radiant summit of my course on earth,
The central sun my eulogies engirth,
Charmed by the giddiness of my rotation.

And when with trembling words thy love is told,
Oh then, my friend, do you confer on me
More than my art can give a thousandfold.

Yet graciously the world hath dealt with thee,
For fair in death is he in life extolled
By an imperishable melody.

XIII

IF I o'erlook thy coldness without blame,
It is because I silently confess:
Indeed he knows not how the happiness
Of all my days is coupled with his name.

He knows not how my heart is all aflame
With love, what lends to life its sacredness,
Who gladly shares his joy and his distress,
Nor whence the favors I have granted came.

All this you know not; shall I therefore tell?
Ah no! I scarce dare speak before thy face,
Lest I so fortunate a dream dispel.

For howso'er thy beauty and thy grace
Do charm, they may but cast a treacherous spell,
And in thy heart affection have no place,

SCARCE shall you need to ask the world excuse
Thy love for me; 'twere nothing mean or low;
And they who scorn the favors I bestow
The favor of my friends must likewise lose.

Many the friends whom I could not refuse,
Should I requite the love of all who know
Th' entire passion of my heart, even though
But distantly, as votaries of my muse.

For a warm heart, though one which you pursue
With poisoned darts envenomed by thy spite,
Must ever win itself warm friends and true.

But thou who feignst to be so harsh—Oh, might
I only die upon thy breast, and you
Close these two eyes which you so well delight!

TOO cruelly you try me. From thy bow
Shaft upon shaft comes speeding at my breast.
You have for me this preference expressed
O'er one whom I a soulless body know.

Yet while thy beauty sets my heart aglow,
I battle with the stormy billows, lest,
Angered and by deception oft distressed,
On thee some bitter name I might bestow.

Ah no, beloved! let me not complain,
Nor by the dark displeasure of my mind
The object worthiest of my love profane.

If to my friendship you were ever blind,
Mine was the fault, for trully it were vain
That hands be joined which know not how to bind.

XVI

THEY call me proud, and yet that I should be
Unpleasing to thee—this doth ne'er annoy;
For thy blond youthfulness disdains, dear boy,
To keep such melancholy company.

I will indulge in jest and drollery,
Rather than seek in tears alone my joy,
And will in prayers to Heaven the hours employ
For th' unwonted gift of gaiety.

Truly for much I thank the kindly fate
Whose gifts beyond what I deserve abound,
Though I have none which might ingratiate.

But who can give me back the cheeks so round
And all the bloom of early youth's estate,
Wherein alone is human beauty found?

XVII

IF those who envy us with craft combine,
So to embarrass us and to divide,
Still do I count thee not one to whom pride
Forbids a passage twixt thy glance and mine.

Yet all too oft for sight of thee I pine,
And though my eyes hold sway on every side,
The loveliest form can never be descried,
Never the loveliest features, namely thine.

Only take heart, nor, timorous, let the rein
Of love fall into Envy's hands, who would
So dearly that we severed still remain.

Be but thyself, and soon this period
Of grief shall pass, and soon our dreams attain
Realization. We deserve they should.

XVIII

LIKE the bright stars I would that when I die
Swift and unconsciously I might grow pale,
And might, like Pindar, even as runs the tale,
Succumb when some day Death is passing by.

Ever in life and in my verse must I
To his incomparable greatness fail
To attain, yet might, my friend, should death assail,
Resemble him. Now, therefore, hark you why.

Moved by the singing, he had watched the play,
And in the theater with his cheek upon
His favorite's comely knee weary he lay.

And when the music ended, and anon
He who so gently nursed him would essay
To rouse him, he to the gods had homeward gone.

LOVE seems the tenderest impulse, and so must
Even the blind, even the deaf conceive;
Yet I am certain of what few believe,
That tenderer is a friend's unfeigned trust.

For love will ever pant with fiery lust,
Itself consuming, itself to inweave;
But nothing can me of my friend bereave,
Till I myself vanish in airy dust.

He shows me only coldness and ill-will,
Mocks me, and long has ceased to understand;
Yet have I never thought to speak him ill.

Ne'er shall he hold and press in his my hand;
But I will praise him yet anew, for still
That which we praise our spirit must command.

XX

O Death, so sweet and yet so feared by all,
I pay you only homage. Oft have I
Sought after thee, and oh how ardently
Longed for thy slumber, whence naught shall recall.

You sleepers, covered by an earthen pall,
And hushed by an eternal lullaby,
Have you not drained life's cup right merrily?
To me alone perhaps it tastes like gall.

You too, I fear me, has the world decoyed,
Your worthiest achievements likewise made
Of no account, your dearest hopes destroyed.

Blest therefore all who greet death undismayed,
Their supplications heard, their longings void,
For every heart at last falls 'neath the spade.

STILL the last dregs are not to be denied,
Drained from the cup of grief which you outpour.
Oh, were I but again the child of yore,
By flowing tears so quickly molified!

Since they have thrust me roughly from their side
To whom immeasurable love I bore,
Confidence fades, and bitter chill creeps o'er
My heart, where love and hope no more abide.

Oh fortunate were I to flee afar
To distant regions, on some foreign strand
To breathe 'neath a more favorable star.

But where, the last ties severed, hatred and
Ingratitude sincere love's guerdon are,
How weary am I of my native land!

HOW shall I still mankind's goodwill retrieve,
Since there is no one who can comfort me?
Let me be wholly plunged in misery,
To weep in silence and in silence grieve.

No longer am I worthy of reprieve,
Since I have perished in his memory;
And in these joints which ache so wearily
The seeds of dissolution I perceive.

But O ye Heavenly Powers, to him allow
Entire happiness. Do not deny
Whatever wishes his heart may avow.

Never again my glance shall meet his eye;
The form of one he hates no longer now,
Alas! even in his dreams, shall he espy.

XXIII

WHILE here I revel in the open air,
I call to me each almost soulless thing.
You butterflies, you birds upon the wing,
Oh come! Fear naught, but trust my loving care.

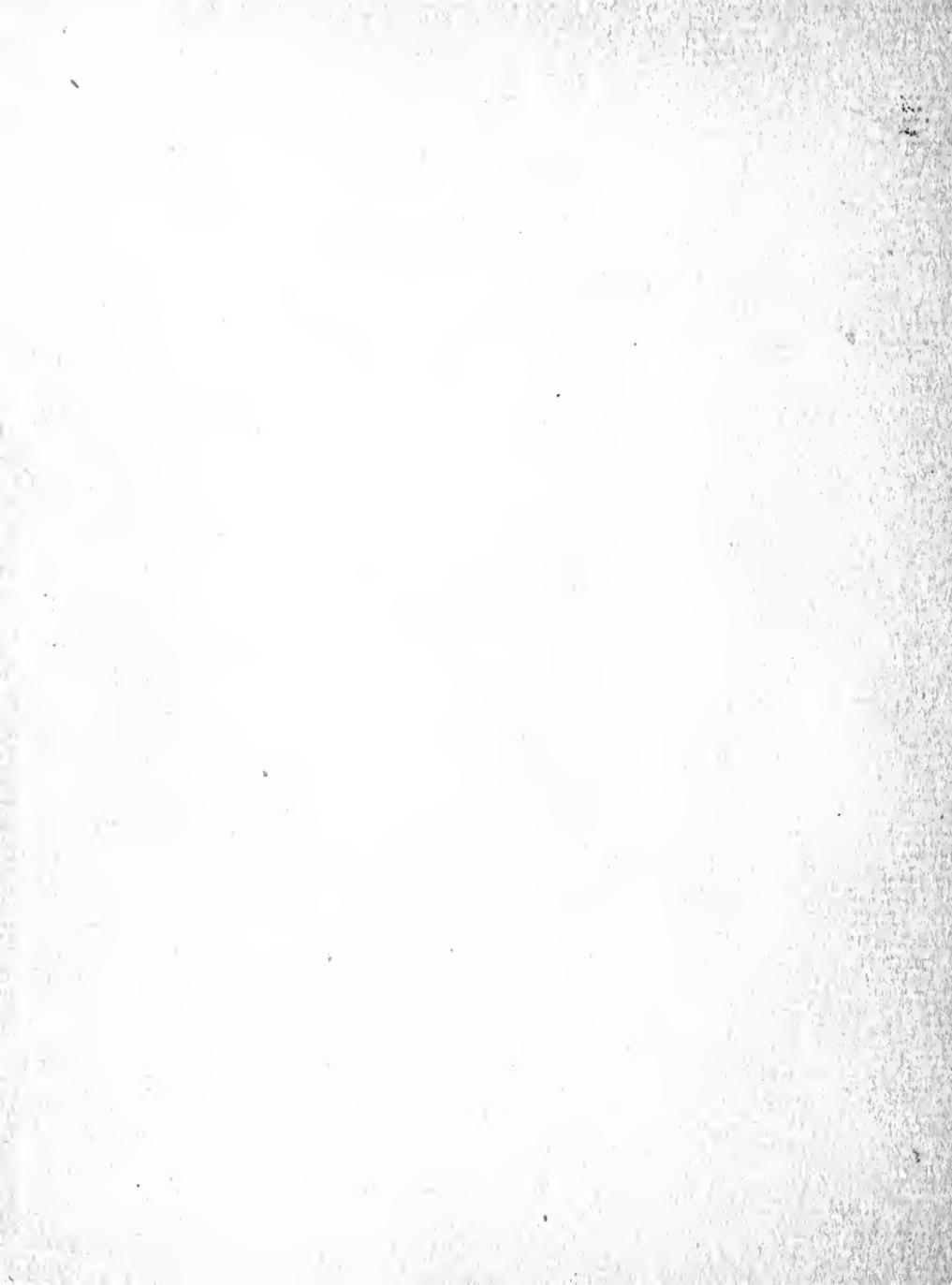
That I should strew for thee a treacherous fare,
Believe it not! For I, now squandering
My days afar from men, of whom they bring
A greater fear than thine—I lay no snare.

Oh count me not among that brutal horde,
Me, who ne'er sought another's injury,
Ever the scorn of men my sole reward.

Therefore from all their pathways let us flee.
You they would catch and kill; with one accord
Me they have laden with their misery.

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